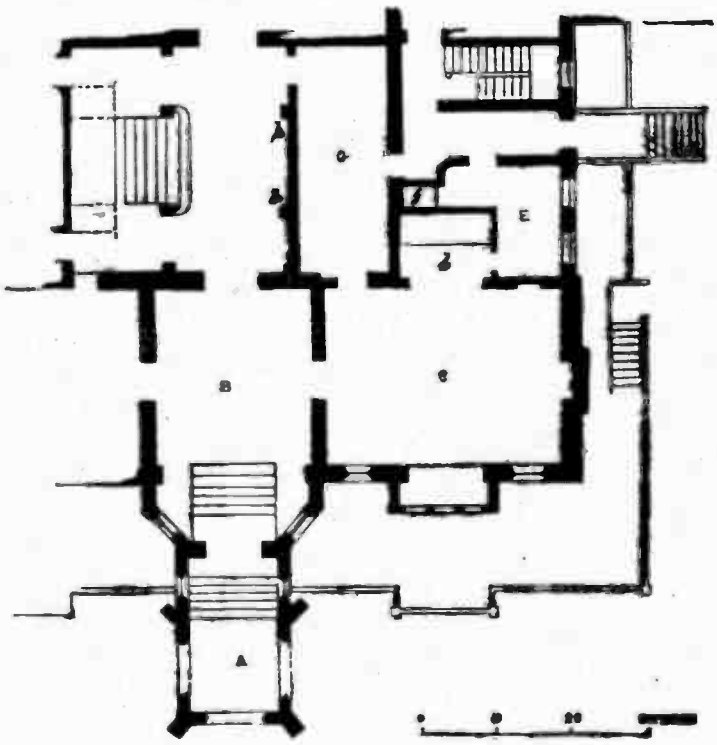
A PLAN CONSIDERED AND ALTERED.



ACCORDING to promise, I now send some remarks on the plan of the new mansion in Kensington Palace Gardens, and accompany them with a drawing that shows a portion of it somewhat differently shaped out, and, as I conceive, materially improved, although that is what I must leave others to decide. The insertion of them may induce increased attention to the highly important matter of plan,—which is all the more deserving of study, because the opportunities of applying it are comparatively of every-day occurrence—not merely in building, but in adding to or altering what is already built.*

To begin at the beginning, then; what strikes me as being, if not a positive inconvenience, a want of convenience, *in limine*,—is an obvious want of shelter at the entrance. There is an ascent up to it of no fewer than twelve steps (some of which might as well have been got out within the hall), and no kind of porch either externally or internally; wherefore, I apprehend, it will now be found necessary on every occasion of an evening party—at least in bad weather, to have recourse to the *fussy* expedient of erecting an ugly temporary awning, in order to obtain the shelter which, if it be actually required, might be far more commodiously provided, once for all, by means of a carriage-porch, for which desirable appendage (unobtainable in a street or other uninterrupted row of houses) the site of the mansion in question affords sufficient space.

Passing over what I should term the objectionableness of putting two such rooms as a library and dining-room, for both of which a certain degree of privacy is desirable, into immediate connection with the entrance-hall, I proceed to consider the dining-room itself; and there we surely detect inconsistencies and want of contrivance. In the first place, the multiplicity of windows is extravagant: one side of the room is entirely occupied by them; and, as if that were not sufficient, there are two others at the end opposite the entrance, with the fire-place between them! So much of window would be quite disproportionate in almost any room, more especially than in one appropriated exclusively as a dining-room, it being the very one which least of all requires a maximum of window light, and that, for the plain common-sense reason that, with the exception of about two months out of twelve, it is the custom now, as it was with the Romans,* to dine in the evening. Nevertheless, in the plan here spoken of, there are more windows in the dining-room than in any of the other apartments. An immoderate proportion of aperture or window surface; and although such does not seem to be the general opinion there, immoderation, faulty *nimiely* in that respect as well as in other matters, is apt to produce a certain air of chilly discomfort and unpleasant exposedness. However, not to dwell too long upon this single point, I will proceed to notice what I cannot help calling a special defect in the present case.

In laying out a mansion of this description care should be taken to secure at least the same degree of commodiousness and completeness, which is to be met with in some preceding instances. In the present one, there are none of those appendages which go towards constituting a complete dining-room, viz. a separate entrance for servants, a serving-room with a *lift* in it, a retiring closet, and a staircase immediately from the kitchen offices. Besides the want of accommodation of that kind, and some of it was thought of and actually provided full a century ago, we here miss that distinctive and eminently characteristic feature—that architectural *sine qua non*, a sideboard alcove. However costly it may be in itself, a sideboard is a mere piece of furniture, which may be placed in any room, but does not therefore decidedly stamp the character of the room, as being specially devised for the purpose to which it happens to be applied; whereas an alcove not only produces positive character, but may be made to produce striking effect also.

Now it will perhaps be said, at least thought, "All this is mighty fine; but talking and doing are quite different things, and you see that a recess of the kind could not be formed in the room you are speaking of." It is, indeed, too late now; but that it might have been accomplished by some modification of that part of the plan will, I think, be conceded after looking at my altered version of it; and it will perhaps be allowed that, if I do censure freely, I do not, as is frequently the case, find fault without being able to show *how* the alleged faults could have been avoided. At any rate, the annexed cut makes evident the possibility of not only forming a recess for a sideboard, but in such manner, too, as to correspond with the window recess or bay on the opposite side of the room, whereby is obtained what, desirable as it is, is either not understood or seldom attended to, namely, *balance* or correspondence of arrangement. Facing a bay between two windows, there would be a recess between two doors, from which a general symmetry would result that would be all the more pleasing, because accompanied with some diversity also. Even the mere getting rid of the two windows at the further end of the room, and the projecting break for the fire-place, would of itself be a material improvement, by substituting repose for that crowded and squeezed-up appearance which must now prevail, in direct contrast, too, to the opposite end, where the only feature is the door from the entrance-hall. Within the sideboard alcove is a door (placed so as to be out of sight of company seated at table), by which servants could freely pass to and fro; and although the adjoining serving-room is somewhat smaller than could be wished, it is better than no accommodation of the kind, and would possess that most convenient apparatus for the railroad transit of dishes from the culinary regions, a *lift*. According to the actual plan, on the contrary, dinner cannot be served up except through what is called the "staircase saloon;" nor can servants gain access to the dining-room by any other way.

As I have not yet discovered the means of putting a quart into a pint measure, I have been obliged, in order to secure the above-mentioned accommodation, to remove the waiting-room, and place it next the inner hall and staircase, like which it would be lighted through its ceiling. So situated, it would serve the additional purpose of a small gallery through which company might pass on proceeding to dinner, instead of going again into the entrance-hall. To this alteration the objection, no doubt, will be, that the "staircase saloon," as it is called, would be destroyed. That that inner vestibule would be reduced in space, is not to be denied; but for a vestibule it would still be of sufficient size; quite as much, indeed, as to be in keeping with the rest of the plan; whereas, at present, it injudiciously makes too much promise, and causes the drawing-rooms to look small in comparison. Should it be said that such is also the case in very many other large mansions, where the hall, though only a room of passage, is made the most spacious and notable part of the interior, my reply is, why then adopt such defective arrangement—such mode of architectural non-sequitur and anti-climax?

Quid dignum tanto feret hic promissor hiatu?

Without being inordinately large in comparison with the rooms, to which it is merely the approach, a vestibule may surely be rendered sufficiently striking, and to exhibit decided effect; more strictly architectural, indeed, than can be done in other rooms where upholsterer and decorator are generally allowed to play the first fiddle uncontrolled by architect, and directed by no other standard of taste than that which happens to be dictated by the freakish "Cynthia of the minute," hight Fashion. I find I am getting satirical!

To come back, then, to the plan as here shown, it will perhaps be admitted that if there be curtailment of the lower part of the staircase or inner vestibule, there is some architectural improvement also. Instead of the wide folding-doors of the hall and picture-gallery coming in at the corners of a square, the effect of which must be excruciating to any architectural eye,—did I say excruciating? I believe I did: and if the reader considers the expression too weak, I leave him to find a stronger and more appropriate one,—the altered plan, on the contrary, brings those doors into a central situation; and although the so-called "saloon" is reduced to the dimensions of a modest vestibule, more of effect than would thereby be lost might be ob-

* We insert our correspondent's remarks on this ground alone, and not with the view of casting any reflections on those engaged on the building noticed, who may have adopted the best arrangements to meet special requirements. We prefer, indeed, that the observations should be considered as applying to an abstract plan such as we gave rather than to the house of any particular individual.—ED.

* There can be no doubt, that the Latin word *Cœna* would be better interpreted by the English one, "dinner" than by "supper." Its etymon distinctly points out the exact correspondence it bears to the modern dinner, it being the *coena* or common, *i. e.* social meal, at which the family and guests assemble together in common.

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